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Agriculture in the Program of Modern Missions

By

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STUDENT VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT

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AGRICULTURE IN THE PROGRAM OF MODERN MISSIONS

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PAST AND PRESENT

Agricultural missions are a comparatively recent development. Farming as an occupation for some of the converted tribes in various parts of the world has been undertaken for many years, but the real agricultural mission, where constructive work in modern agricultural education is done, dates back hardly more than a decade.

Pardon a personal reference. A few months before graduation at an Agricultural College, in the year 1905, I heard a wonderful appeal made by a representative of the Student Volunteer Movement, in which he said that men of all talents could find a place in modern missions. I became a volunteer,—after weighing carefully the opportunities I would have for service for Christ, here in the homeland, with its countless workers for agricultural uplift, and those on the foreign field, where I would probably be the only worker in my special line, possibly in a whole nation. Naturally the foreign field

opportunities outweighed those at home, and I became a volunteer.

Leaving college I went on the farm for a couple of years' actual farming experience and practice. Later, when I applied to the various boards of my denomination, the word came back, "We have no need for a man with your training." Disheartened, I set a year as the maximum time during which I would still be subject to call; then, I decided, I would turn elsewhere for my life work.

Six months later a call came to go to Brazil to organize and direct an agricultural school for another denomination. The call was accepted and a few months later I was in Brazil, facing a new language, a new people, new difficulties and problems little dreamed of.

At present there are three great centers of development of agricultural work as a direct part of missionary effort: Ewing Christian College, Allahabad, India, Canton Christian College, China, and the work at Lavras, Minas, in Brazil. The results of these undertakings have more than justified the most sanguine hopes of their founders and organizers.

We are on the threshold of a great new era in all mission endeavour. The experience of the past

will be used as a basis for plans for new developments until now thought impossible. Great resources of men and money will be thrown into this new effort and a new day of Christian enterprise will dawn in many lands.

Already there are many plans for new agricultural work. Eight agricultural schools have been planned for Mexico, and certainly eight good Christian agricultural schools would mean an incalculable help for Mexico in her present condition of distress. Chile is to have a great agricultural mission, for which the property has already been bought. Similarly the work in India and in China will be developed on a new scale of expansion, while the loud call of African missions for new agricultural units is due to have an early and generous response.

It may almost be said that there is hardly a mission land where agricultural missions cannot be added to the program with great benefit to the whole cause of Christ.

PURPOSE

What place has agriculture in missionary endeavour? The primary aim of all mission work is evangelistic,—redeeming the lives of men. Now

many students, many farmers, many public officials and many laborers come in direct contact with the Gospel message through agricultural missions who would not be reached in any other way. If the school, or whatever agricultural work it may be, is manned by real missionaries, it will transform many lives through the power of Christ.

Then there is the general uplift and human help. Christ not only brought the Gospel to mankind, but He fed the hungry, in addition to healing the sick and giving sight to the blind and hearing to the dumb.

The expression of the rescue worker of one of our great cities has always impressed me, "What good does it do to try to convert a man, if you send him out with an empty stomach into the cold night, to pass by the free lunch saloon?" What good does it do to convert the heathen, and make them want to better their condition for themselves, and their families and their communities, if nothing practical is done to help them? It is an outstanding fact in all missionary fields that the converted man is more ambitious in a legitimate way than his people in general. Is it fair to feed them spiritually and leave them without the requisite help for their bodily needs? This is precisely what agricultural missions stand ready to do. They are Christianity in the concrete.

I think it can also be said that in many mission fields no kind of work can be undertaken that will so readily win the sympathy of the people. One of the great problems in missionary effort is to break through the crust of prejudice, suspicion and opposition and get the real sympathy of the people. Until this is done the Gospel message is of little effect. All people appreciate a practical visible help, even from an outsider and foreigner. In most mission fields there is the greatest possible need for the betterment of agricultural conditions, that the many millions may be properly fed and clothed. If help is offered along these lines, there is immediate response from the people and government alike. In the past these outside helps were more or less ignored by the missionaries. Educational work is now a part of almost all missionary endeavor. Medical, hospital and nursing efforts are standard forms of missionary effort. No less is it to become a fact that agricultural missions will soon be a part of the full missionary program in almost all the mission fields.

Mission schools as a rule have no financial aid, beyond the salaries paid the missionary teachers and the purchase of the land and the equipment. The matter of scholarships and help to the worthy poor who want educational advantages is a most harrassing question. Mission schools are certainly

not to confine their efforts to the children of the wealthy who can afford to pay well for their education, and it only pauperizes those of small means when we give them their educational training without any return. So some system of self-help, where the student at least earns his board and the mission school gives him his tuition, must be worked out. The farm in connection with other educational work, especially with the agricultural school, offers an excellent opportunity for this self-help.

These many benefits of agricultural missions fully justify their existence. And the opportunities which agricultural missionary work offers to qualified young men fully justifies their acceptance of such a call to dedicate their lives to this form of Christian service.

PERSONNEL

This brings us to the question of great importance: Where are the men to be found who will take charge of these new developments and strengthen those already undertaken? The lot of the agricultural missionary is not an easy one. He must confront conditions entirely different from those for which he was trained. The majority of mission work is done in either tropical or semi-tropical

countries. We have very few men trained in tropical agriculture. The first few years of work will be spent in getting the language and above all in getting oneself adjusted to new conditions of soil, climate, plants, animals and conditions of labor.

Worlds of old routine and superstition must be done away with. Of course, the man who thinks that he must scrap all that is being done, even if it is done in a backward way, will soon come to grief. Still one seldom finds awaiting him the kind of work that may serve as a guide. A beginning must be made from the ground up, and every new situation must be met with courage and determination.

Before stating the qualifications of the men needed let it be said that it will require real moral fibre for an agricultural missionary to stand by his job. His salary will be only a living wage. His special opportunities for learning and his experience will in a few years make him a valuable man, sought after by commercial interests that will offer tempting salaries. Many opportunities for personal advantage will present themselves. But just as the medical missionary turns down these temptations, so must the agricultural worker. He must remember that he is in the work for

Christ's sake, not his own,—for the enrichment of humanity, not of himself.

The primary need of any missionary worker is Christ-like character, a real Christian experience as a background. Without this, however useful he may be in a technical sense, his usefulness as a missionary is very small. He had much better pursue his own way here at home, because on the field, just as the opportunity for service is greater, the opportunity for doing harm is infinitely greater than here at home. On the field one's work and one's character are scrutinized constantly by many who would gladly find one wanting. So to speak, every missionary is constantly in the limelight, and he must be a true blue follower of Christ if he is to make good. Of course, it is likewise true that many have gone to the field, and will go in the future, who will have their character put to these new tests in ways that will bring out all the good in them, as would never be the case in the ordinary pursuits of life at home. Candidates for missionary work all feel their incompleteness, but they know that grace will be given them to meet the new situations and spiritual growth will keep pace with the new needs.

The next qualification is what I should call fellowship, or the ability to be a good mixer. At home

a man's work is helped by his attitude of good fellowship and accessibility to others, but it is not absolutely essential to success. On the field he meets such an entirely new situation, that if he is "uppish" or aloof from those among whom he works, he has little chance of success.

Provided with Christian experience and characteristics of good fellowship, the next thing is technical training. The work is hourly becoming more complex and the need of specialists in all lines is being felt. Ultimately agricultural missions will function in all three major lines of agricultural work—education, extension and research. These are not put in the relative order of their importance, but of their development, in actual practice. All forms and phases of agricultural work known in the United States come into play, and no doubt for many special situations new forms will be devised on the foreign field.

Standard requirements for all missionaries are sound health and the ability to acquire a foreign language.

Is the great opportunity now before the churches to be lost because men are not available who will give their lives for this Christian service? I think not. Let the call sound in every agricultural col-

lege of the land, let there be prayer and intercession by all interested, and the result will be such an offering of life for this service that all the needs can be met and the work planned and needed can be undertaken, not a generation hence, but *now*.

No reference has been made in this pamphlet to the wonderful uses to which men in evangelistic or educational mission work can put any agricultural experience and training they may have had at home. It has dealt solely with the man who on the mission field follows agriculture as a profession.

Those who wish to inquire further into this form of service and to learn of present opportunities should write to the Student Volunteer Movement, 25 Madison Avenue, New York City.

